

Labor-Management Advisory Council on Workers' Compensation

The Labor-Management Advisory Council (LMAC) was commissioned by the Department of Labor and Industry in 2006. The goal of the LMAC is to enhance business competitiveness through a safe and healthy workforce, while maintaining benefits to injured workers and reducing insurance costs. The LMAC has five employer representatives: Bill Dahlgren (Sun Mountain Sports), Annette Hoffman (St. Vincent's Healthcare), Riley Johnson (National Federation of Independent Business), Connie Welsh (State of Montana) and Bob Worthington (Montana Municipal Insurance Authority); and five labor representatives, Doug Buman (Laborers' International Union of North America), Jacquie Helt (AFL-CIO), Dan Lee (AFL-CIO), Don Judge (Injured Workers Resource Council), and Jason Miller.

According to the 2005 Bureau of Labor Statistics, Montana's injury rate is 57% higher than the national average. The National Council on Compensation Insurance (NCCI) projects that Montana could reduce costs by 37.5% and save \$145 million in workers' compensation costs if the frequency of injury among Montana's workers was reduced to the national average.

Lessening the duration of work-related injuries would likewise reduce costs. Currently, an injured worker in Montana is off work an average of 136 days. If Montana was in line with the national average for duration (85 days), the system could save \$12.5 million per year (NCCI estimate). Based on the fact that Montana has significantly higher frequency and duration rates than the national average, safety and return-to-work have become primary areas of emphasis for the LMAC.

To address these two major impact areas, the LMAC recently formed a public/private partnership called WorkSafeMT to direct and coordinate a host of safety programs and return-to-work programs and hired a project manager. WorkSafeMT is modeled on WorkSafeBC (British Columbia), which has an impressive multi-year track record of measurable success.

The LMAC coordinated "60 Summits MT" workshops in Billings, Great Falls, and Missoula in April 2008. Over 220 business owners, medical providers, claims examiners, insurers, and other workers' compensation professionals heard Dr. Jennifer Christian detail the benefits of return-to-work. Small groups developed action plans for implementing return-to-work recommendations from the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine's (ACOEM) guideline on "Preventing Needless Work Disability." The overarching concept was that return-to-work benefits everyone—the injured worker, the employer, and the workers' compensation system.

Advisory Council meetings are open to the public and public comment is encouraged. For more information on the council, visit <http://erd.dli.mt.gov/wcstudyproject/labormngmntadvisorycouncilonwc.asp>.